

How to Become Accredited

Procedures Manual for

Eligibility,
Candidacy, and
Initial Accreditation



**Western Association of Schools and Colleges
Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities**

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Introduction

The Commission has prepared this procedures manual for institutions that are interested in pursuing accreditation by the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. The manual explains the steps involved in moving from Eligibility through Candidacy to Initial Accreditation.

This manual is intended for use in tandem with the *Handbook of Accreditation*, which includes the Standards of Accreditation necessary for an institution to achieve Candidacy and Initial Accreditation. The *Handbook* may be downloaded at no charge from the WASC website, at <http://wascsenior.org/resources/eligibility>.

Two Pathways

The policies that follow provide for two pathways to Initial Accreditation. One is for institutions that are either entirely new (*de novo*), that are being created within the WASC region, or that have been in operation but have never sought accreditation with WASC or other agencies. A second is for institutions currently accredited by another institutional accrediting agency that is recognized as such by the US Department of Education and that seek Initial Accreditation with WASC. These pathways should be reviewed carefully in the section below, **Who May Apply**, in order to ascertain under which pathway an applicant may apply.

Inquiries may be directed to WASC, 985 Atlantic Avenue, Suite 100, Alameda, CA 94501; (510) 748-9001; email: wascsr@wascsenior.org; website: <http://wascsenior.org/>.

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The Commission has established formal procedures by which institutions can move through the required stages that lead to accreditation.

Each stage has specific criteria, processes, and timeframes. (See the Overview on page 25 for a summary.) **An institution starting the process should carefully consider the requirements for each step to ensure its understanding of the process and be aware that the time frame for the entire process may take as many as eight years.**

Who May Apply?

Pathway A: Institutions Not Accredited by a DOE-Recognized Accrediting Agency

The procedures described in the first section below apply to institutions that are not already accredited. Such institutions are often being developed as new institutions or have not achieved accreditation from another institutional accrediting agency. These may be located either within the WASC region or, by special Commission action, external to the region. The applicable procedures assume that a *de novo* institution is in the process of developing its structures and processes over time, or that the institution has not previously obtained accreditation from WASC or from any other DOE-recognized institutional accrediting agency. These procedures, therefore, provide for several occasions for formative input at multiple critical stages leading to Initial Accreditation.

Pathway B: Currently Accredited Institutions

The Commission has also adopted a similar though distinct policy by which established institutions holding accreditation with another institutional accrediting agency that is recognized by the U. S. Department of Education may seek Initial Accreditation by WASC. This policy, “Initial Accreditation of Institutions Currently Accredited by a USDOE-Recognized Agency,” is found on pages 27-29 below. Regardless of the policy applicable to an applicant institution, the institution is expected to meet the WASC Eligibility Criteria and Standards of Accreditation.

The institution should consult with WASC staff to verify the pathway under which it may apply.

Institutional Location in the WASC Region

Postsecondary institutions incorporated in the states of California and Hawaii, the territories of Guam and American Samoa, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Palau, the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, and the Pacific Island Trust Territories that offer one or more programs leading to the baccalaureate or higher degree may apply to the Commission for eligibility. The institution must be able to demonstrate that the primary locus of its governance and operational oversight activity is based within the WASC region. This is a matter of particular concern to institutions with operations than span the boundaries of more than one regional accrediting agency. The institution must establish that it is domiciled within the WASC region (California, Hawaii, or the Pacific Territories) as set forth in the WASC Constitution. Establishing domicile ordinarily requires that the institution’s enabling documents, such as articles of incorporation, be filed with the appropriate State or territorial authorities in the appropriate jurisdiction. It also ordinarily requires that the institution demonstrate that its executive leadership and appropriate support staff are based within the WASC region and at least one campus, with the authority to award degrees, operates entirely within the WASC region. Institutions within this region that are part of a larger system or organization that is headquartered outside the WASC region may be considered for eligibility if the institution meets the WASC definition of a

separately accreditable unit. (See *Policy Statement on Separately Accreditable Units* under *Dealing with Institutions that Operate Cross-Regionally* in the *WASC Policies Manual*.)

The Commission is an institutional accrediting body that emphasizes academic quality and processes that ensure educational effectiveness throughout the institution. It accredits institutions rather than individual programs, including all institutional operations wherever located. In so doing, it reviews evidence of the institution's capacity to achieve educational effectiveness—structures, processes, resources, procedures, and outcomes—as well as evidence of the academic quality of educational programs within the institution. Where an institution provides programs not commonly offered by accredited institutions of higher education, the institution bears the burden of demonstrating that the subject matter offered is appropriate to higher education, academic in quality and rigor, and can be reviewed by peers from accredited institutions.

Applying for Eligibility

Institutions interested in obtaining WASC accreditation are reviewed to determine if they are eligible to pursue accreditation. This process, guided by 23 Eligibility Criteria, which anticipate the WASC Standards, screens each institution to determine whether it is ready to begin the formal process of data collection and institutional reflection required for an accreditation review. The screening process is conducted by the Eligibility Review Committee (ERC) – a group of peer educational evaluators trained for this role – which conducts its work through smaller panels of its members, selected with reference to the nature of the applicant.

Before You Apply

Institutions are **strongly encouraged** to begin the application process by:

1. Consulting with WASC staff to discuss your institution's intention and readiness for the accreditation process and to verify which pathway it is qualified to pursue.
2. Attending a WASC-sponsored workshop that describes the level of readiness expected of the institution at each step as it moves through Eligibility, Candidacy, and Initial Accreditation. This workshop is offered annually in connection with WASC's Academic Resource Conference (ARC) (generally in April) and at other announced times as interest may require.

These steps provide important perspectives for the institution, helping it evaluate its own readiness, and increasing the likelihood that an ERC panel will have sufficient information upon which to make an informed decision regarding its eligibility. They can also help in preparing your application by:

- a. Providing additional information on the WASC values, policies and processes, Eligibility Criteria, and Standards of Accreditation, together with essential WASC documents and publications.
- b. Offering an explanation of the 23 Eligibility Criteria and an appraisal of the institution's readiness to meet them, the eligibility application process, and (as needed) examples of other institution's eligibility applications, typical timelines, and other resources.
- c. Reviewing the worksheet that the ERC panel will use in evaluating the application, thus guiding the institution's preparation of its application.
- d. Arranging one visit by WASC staff to the institution (if requested, and with travel costs invoiced to the institution) to become familiar with the institutional setting and context, and to explain the WASC processes to others at the institution.

- e. Providing staff review of a draft of the Eligibility Application, giving formative feedback on the completeness of the application and, as needed, the suitability of the materials provided.
- f. Requesting clarification of the application or identifying additional information for the institution to provide in anticipation of the ERC panel review.

The Eligibility Process

1. An institution begins the process by submitting the Notification of Intent to Apply Form, which includes stipulations executed by both the president/chief executive officer and the chair of the governing board, indicating its commitment to comply with WASC policies and procedures. At this time, the institution must also submit the Application fee. Once these are received, the institution will be given access to an online portal through which the full Eligibility application will be submitted. The institution must designate an Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO), who will be the primary contact person with WASC on all accreditation matters. Detailed information about submitting the application, required forms, fees, and other resources may be found at <http://wascsenior.org/resources/eligibility>.

The Eligibility Application, which will be uploaded through the web portal, consists of the following elements:

- The Eligibility Report which addresses each of the 23 Eligibility Criteria (explained in full detail later in this document).
 - The Summary Data Form
2. Following staff review of the application and further consultation with staff, the institution may elect to suspend consideration of its application for a period of up to six months to allow it time to address needed changes. The institution may withdraw formally from the Eligibility process without prejudice at any time prior to an ERC panel review and receive a refund of 50 percent of the Eligibility Application fee.
 3. Once the full application is received, WASC staff will select and convene an ERC panel to review and act upon the application, generally within 30 to 60 days of receiving the application. Institutional representatives will be invited to participate in one portion of this review, via conference call, to answer questions and provide clarification, as needed. A WASC staff liaison is assigned to the institution in time to participate on the conference call. This staff member will work with the institution during the subsequent stages of the review process, providing consultation and helping to appraise institutional readiness for each stage. The institution is expected to work closely and cooperatively with the assigned liaison at each step. This will include setting an appointment to meet with the liaison for planning purposes either at the WASC office or, as mutually arranged, at the institution after the grant of Eligibility and prior to submitting the Letter of Intent (if applicable) and the application for Candidacy/Initial Accreditation.
 4. Directly after the review, staff will prepare an action letter (the formal document WASC uses to communicate its actions), detailing the panel's findings regarding the institution's standing on each of the 23 Criteria. There are three possible outcomes following a review by the ERC:
 - a. If the application is **approved**, the institution is granted Eligibility for a period of four years. The institution is then eligible to apply for Candidacy and begins this process by submitting the Application for Candidacy and Initial Accreditation and fee within 60

days of receipt of the action letter indicating approval by the ERC panel (see the current fee schedule). The fee includes WASC staff support through the Candidacy process. (Additional visit-related fees are invoiced at the time of each visit.)

- b. If the application is **deferred**, the institution may re-apply with a supplemental application, addressing only those Criteria that the ERC panel had determined that the institution did not meet in the first application. The first and second readers of the original panel review the supplemental application. A supplemental fee (as listed on the current fee schedule) is due with the supplemental application if it is submitted within two years of receipt of the action letter. After two years, the institution must reapply for Eligibility and the application fee applies.
- c. If the application is **denied**, the institution may resubmit an application that addresses all of the Eligibility Criteria. Typically, an ERC panel will act to deny an application rather than defer when an application fails to meet a substantial number of criteria, especially those related to institutional capacity. An institution wishing to request reconsideration of an action to deny Eligibility by an ERC panel may do so by submitting a statement clearly setting forth the reasons why the institution disagrees with the panel's findings as stated in the action letter. The institution's statement, along with the action letter, is sent to the President/Executive Director within 30 days after receipt of the action letter. These materials are then presented to the Executive Committee of the Commission for its review and final determination. The requesting institution pays an Eligibility Reconsideration processing fee (see the current fee schedule). The Commission Review and Appeal Process (outlined in the *Handbook of Accreditation* for other accreditation decisions) does not apply to Eligibility denials.

Eligibility Criteria

The Eligibility Criteria are basic qualifications that an institution of higher education must meet to be considered for Candidacy for Accreditation. The Criteria establish a basis for determining that the institution has purposes accreditable by the Commission and has developed sufficient planning and operational activities to provide a reasonable basis for believing that Candidacy could be achieved within the Eligibility period, normally four years. A determination of Eligibility is not an official status with the Commission but only the outcome of a preliminary review that enables an institution to proceed with the planning, data collection, institutional self-reflection, and evaluation required for Candidacy and Initial Accreditation reviews. By granting Eligibility, no assurance is made that an institution will eventually be granted either Candidacy or Initial Accreditation. These judgments will be made in light of additional institutional presentations and on-site reviews to assess the institution's alignment with the WASC Standards of Accreditation.

Following is a list of the 23 Eligibility Criteria. Below the explanation of each Criterion is listed the related supporting documentation that institutions typically provide with their Eligibility Application. The list of documents is intended as a guideline for institutions preparing for the Eligibility Review process; either additional or similar documents may be provided in keeping with the focus of each Criterion. Providing all relevant information in an organized and succinct form will assist with the staff review and the Committee panel decision-making process. Narrative and documents are uploaded to an online portal for review. Staff will provide instructions on submission procedures, including providing a username and password, upon receipt of the requisite application form and fees.

Criterion 1. Authority

The institution is authorized to operate as an educational institution and to award degrees by the appropriate governmental organization or agency as required by each of the jurisdictions or regions in which it operates. For institutions incorporated in California, the institution shall have completed the full formal state approval process; temporary approval will not be accepted. For law schools in California, the institution shall also demonstrate that it is accredited by the California State Bar Association. Institutions offering online law degrees, which are not eligible for accreditation by the State Bar of California Committee of Bar Examiners, may be considered for eligibility provided they are deemed to have met all other WASC Eligibility Criteria.¹

- Degree-granting approval statement or certificate from an appropriate governmental body

Criterion 2. Institutional Integrity: Purposes

The institution's purposes are clearly defined and appropriate for higher education. They are formally adopted by the governing board and published in key institutional documents. Published statements reflect the institution's commitment to achieving student learning.

- Copy of statement(s) of mission or institutional purposes as they appear in a published catalog, institutional website, or other public document

Criterion 3. Institutional Integrity: Alignment

The institution offers academic programs and administrative support consistent with its purposes, and ensures a climate of openness and academic freedom. Institutions should prepare to demonstrate compliance with CFR 1.4 and Guideline: "The institution has published or has readily available policies on academic freedom. For those institutions that strive to instill specific beliefs and world views, policies clearly state how these views are implemented and ensure that these conditions are consistent with academic freedom. Due process procedures are disseminated, demonstrating that faculty and students are protected in their quest for truth."

- Statements of Academic Freedom from official publications, such as a faculty handbook
- Conflict of Interest statements for board members

Criterion 4. Organizational Structure and Governance

Location: The institution is able to demonstrate that the primary locus of its governance and operational oversight activity is based within the WASC region.

Institutional Type: Private institutions, whether organized as non-profit or for-profit corporations or as partnerships, will present policies and planning documents making it clear that decisions about the distribution of surpluses or profits give priority to sustaining and enhancing the educational mission and academic infrastructure of the institution, and to ensuring effective student learning and student success.

Sustainability: The Commission does not accredit individuals or sole proprietorships. The ownership structure of an organization demonstrates that it is sustainable beyond the life or competency of any one member or investor and will remain in compliance with all applicable laws and WASC requirements during transitions of any members, owners, or investors.

Accountability: The institution has a functioning governing board (or the equivalent) responsible for the quality, integrity, and financial sustainability of the institution and for ensuring that the institution's mission is being achieved. The governing board is an independent policy-making body capable of

¹ An exception to this requirement may be granted when an applicant institution qualifies under the previous BPPVE legislation, CEC §94739 (b)(8) which exempts from BPPE oversight an institution that charges less than \$2,500 for its educational programs. The Commission has determined that this exemption can apply, for example, to research institutions that pay doctoral students as members of funded research units rather than charge them tuition.

reflecting constituent and public interest through its membership, activities, and decisions. The board must demonstrate its responsibility for, and involvement with, strategic planning for the development of the institution through and beyond the period necessary for accreditation. As evidenced by both its bylaws and its practice, the board must demonstrate that it has the authority to evaluate the chief executive officer's performance, including setting the terms of the CEO's contract and renewing or terminating the contract as may be necessary. A majority of the board members must not be employed by the institution; be family members related to the chief operating officers, shareholders, or trustees of the institution; or have a personal financial interest in the institution. Its membership must be sufficient in size and composition to fulfill board responsibilities. The board must demonstrate that it has functioning committees, including at a minimum audit, academic affairs, finance, and membership or nominating or the equivalent. If a separate institutional governing board is not possible or appropriate, the Commission may approve alternative means by which this criterion may be met. Neither the chief executive officer nor another institutional executive officer may serve as the chair of the institution's governing board. If the applicant is a proprietary institution and the chief executive officer is also an owner or investor, the bylaws must clearly designate that the board has the authority to appoint, evaluate and, if necessary, terminate this officer.

Interpretive Guidelines:

Location:

- Institutions operating entirely in an online modality, with students enrolled without regard to geographical location, are expected to be incorporated or otherwise legally constituted within the region and have their primary executive offices in the region, including operational functions (executive offices, student records, board minutes, support staff, etc.)
- If the applicant is part of a larger system or organization, the entity that WASC would accredit must meet these location requirements.

Institutional Type:

- Both for-profit and non-profit institutions are equally expected to demonstrate compliance with the Eligibility Criteria and Standards for Accreditation. Particular attention will be given to areas related to protecting students as consumers and allocation of surplus revenues/profits. Special attention will be given to practices related to marketing and disclosure, recruitment, student support, retention and completion, and student loan default rates. .
- The legal configuration of the entity that WASC will accredit, as defined by its bylaws and other founding documents, may need to be evaluated by WASC legal counsel. Because the structure of an organization may have many distinctive and sometimes novel aspects, a legal opinion that the entity conforms in all dimensions to WASC expectations may be essential early in the accreditation process. The applicant will be invoiced for related costs.

Sustainability:

- Clarity is required on the exact nature of the entity that WASC would be accrediting. Rather than a person or family, the entity needs to be a legally recognized organization that envisions a long and stable future, beyond the life or circumstances of one or two persons.
- WASC exercises an interest in ensuring that an institution will remain operational and effective independent of the life circumstances of its owners or investors. This is typically manifest by a formally constituted board, the bylaws of which specify how the board constitutes and succeeds itself, how it ensures against being dismissed in its entirety by the actions of an owner or investor, and how its specified functions ensure sufficient engagement with the institution to fulfill its fiduciary responsibilities

Accountability:

- The organization must incorporate in its legal documents operational principles that demonstrate interest in the valid interests of external stakeholders including students, their families, employers, taxpayers, the educational community, and the larger society. In general, legal documents will describe a formal process by which independent non-owner board members will evaluate the leadership of the institution and take action as necessary to ensure the integrity and effectiveness of its operations.
- If an applicant's educational program operates as a unit within a larger organization which WASC does not accredit, such as a research or health care institution, a public school district or consortium, or a charter school organization, in which board oversight is exercised at the level of the parent organization, the applicant must document how oversight of the educational program is exercised within the context of the larger organization. Reporting lines and delegations of authority should be sufficiently clear to demonstrate that the oversight by the governance structures is suitable to the successful operation of the educational programs. Documents defining these relationships should be included with the application. (See "Policy on Institutions with Non-educational Components.")
- WASC may seek the review of legal counsel prior to the Eligibility review to ensure that the accountability structures are responsive to WASC's responsibilities in this area.

Expected Documentation:

- A current list of, and biographical information about (including affiliations), all governing board members
- A copy of the governing board bylaws and documents establishing committee structures and statements of board responsibilities
- For private institutions: Articles of incorporation, describing the type of organizational structure (e.g., non-profit 501(c)(3), Limited Liability Corporation, Subchapter S, etc.), and identifying as appropriate the owners or investors, and designating whether the institution is owned or sponsored by a related entity which is not eligible for WASC accreditation. (See the "Policy on Related Entities" and "Policy on Institutions with Non-educational Components," available on the WASC website, for detailed information.)
- Certification that the board does not have a majority of persons with employment, family, or personal interest in the institution, signed by the chief executive officer and governing board chair
- A copy of the board's conflict of interest policy

Criterion 5. Chief Executive Officer

The institution has a chief executive officer who is appointed by the governing board and whose full-time or primary responsibility is to the institution².

- Name, address, and biographical information or curriculum vitae of chief executive officer
- Description of CEO's primary responsibilities to the institution including, though not limited to, time spent on campus performing administrative duties and/or fulfilling teaching responsibilities

Criterion 6. Administrative Capacity

The institution has a chief financial officer whose full-time or primary responsibility is to the institution, and sufficient staff with appropriate preparation and experience to provide the administrative services necessary to conduct and support its affairs and the achievement of its purposes³.

- Organizational chart, including names of those in key positions
- Names and biographical information of key administrative staff
- Position description of the chief financial officer

Criterion 7. Operational Status

It must be clear that institutional planning and resources are sufficiently mature to ensure that, by the time of the Candidacy review, the institution will be operational with students actively pursuing its degree program(s).

- Current or intended schedule of classes
- Enrollment history of the institution; if operational, for up to three years
- Other evidences of planning

² In some cases the applicant may be an educational program within a larger institution in which the chief executive officer is not the CEO of the parent entity but rather a person designated as head of the educational program. In these cases, the educational leader must be subject to the same concepts of appointment, review, and accountability as specified in Criterion #4. If the educational leader is appointed by a governing board that is comprised of publicly elected individuals, it must be evident that the leader will not be subject to arbitrary removal for political reasons. In any case, the executive leader of the educational program must hold an assignment of time and responsibility to these functions sufficient to ensure the educational program's strength and sustainability.

³ This Criterion may be met if the financial and related administrative operations of an educational program are subsumed within those of a parent entity, provided that it is possible for evaluators to obtain information specific to the educational program sufficient to support judgments about the adequacy of its funding and of its administrative support personnel and services. One individual within such a financial unit must be designated to ensure financial oversight of the academic program and its adequate participation in the overall institutional budget process.

Criterion 8. Degree Programs: Extent

Substantial portions of the institution's educational offerings are programs that lead to degrees, and significant proportions of its students are enrolled in the degree programs^{4, 5}.

- List of degrees, together with course and credit requirements for each degree
- Catalog designation of college-level courses for which degree credit will be granted
- Enrollment projections or history for degree programs

Criterion 9. Degree Programs: Quality

The institution's degree programs are congruent with its purposes, are based on recognized higher education fields of study, are of sufficient content and length, and are conducted at levels of quality and rigor appropriate to the degrees offered. At least one degree program must lead to the baccalaureate degree or higher. Institutions seeking to offer graduate degrees must be able to demonstrate that they have an appropriate graduate-level academic culture or have plans to develop a graduate culture. Relevant factors include faculty qualifications and workload, research support, access to library and other research facilities, and explicitly stated thesis or dissertation requirements.

- Data on retention, persistence, and numbers and disciplines of graduates, where available
- Catalog (or intended copy) describing program(s) being offered and graduation requirements
- Other marketing materials not submitted relative to Criterion 8 above

Criterion 10. Educational Objectives and Student Learning

The institution clearly defines and publishes educational objectives for each program, including expected student learning outcomes, and identifies how these objectives and outcomes will be addressed within the curriculum. Strategies for assessing students' achievement of these educational objectives, including direct review of student work products, are also established.

- Published statements that describe educational objectives and learning outcomes for each program
- Curriculum maps illustrating the integration of program learning outcomes with course learning outcomes
- Outcomes assessment methodology, with criteria and framework for program and/or unit reviews, created with significant faculty involvement
- At least two sample syllabi, including statements of how learning outcomes will be assessed for the courses submitted

Criterion 11. Academic Credit

The institution awards academic credits based on generally accepted practices in degree-granting institutions of higher education.

- Institutional policies on award of credit

⁴ This Criterion, especially when applied to educational programs being offered within a larger organization, requires that the institution be able to demonstrate that its educational function is fundamentally that of higher learning rather than of a career training program or an in-service credential program. This Criterion does not require that the parent entity define itself as an institution of higher learning.

⁵ WASC does accredit institutions whose mode of delivery is entirely online.

Criterion 12. Transfer Credit

If the institution accepts transfer students, it has established policies for the review and acceptance of transfer credits consistent with WASC policies.

- Institutional policies on transfer of credit, including criteria for their acceptance, and maximum allowable number of transfer credits applicable to its degree programs
- Position description for person(s) making judgments about the appropriateness of transfers of credit, including required qualifications for persons holding this position

Criterion 13. General Education

The institution defines and incorporates into all of its undergraduate degree programs a substantial component of general education, including both lower- and upper-division offerings, designed to ensure basic collegiate skills, breadth of knowledge, and the structures of intellectual inquiry. Educational objectives for the general education program, which include student learning outcomes, are periodically reviewed and revised with faculty involvement, and include demonstrated competence in writing, critical thinking, scientific literacy, computational skills, and an introduction to the broad domains of knowledge. Degree credit for general education programs should be consistent with levels of quality and rigor appropriate to higher education. Institutions implementing a baccalaureate degree-completion model, inverted curriculum (in which career-related courses are completed first, with general education courses being taken in the final years), or other curricular format that relies on students transferring significant portions of general education from other institutions, must describe the criteria or overall philosophy of general education by which it determines which general education credits it will accept from other institutions toward its baccalaureate degrees.

- Rationale for the design of the general education program
- List of general education courses, including catalog descriptions
- For an undergraduate institution, syllabi submitted for review should include two general education courses

Criterion 14. Faculty

The institution has a substantial core of qualified faculty, sufficient in size, background, and experience to support all of the institution's educational program offerings, including a core of faculty whose primary responsibility is to the institution⁶. A clear statement of faculty responsibilities must exist, which include the development and review of the curriculum, and assessment of student learning at multiple levels.

- Full-time and part-time faculty roster, including degrees earned (with names of regionally accredited institutions where earned) and relevant prior experience
- Statement of faculty responsibilities
- Criteria used for designating full- or part-time
- Faculty assigned to courses (where available)
- Current curriculum vitae for full-time faculty members (where this number is large, a sample of vitae is sufficient)

⁶ Academic programs that rely on professional staff from within a parent organization, such as researchers or academic administrators, to serve as faculty must specify the roles, responsibilities, and time allocations related to their roles as faculty members of the academic program.

- Description of the structure and processes used for faculty governance, involvement in curriculum development and review, setting academic standards, and participation (if any) in the institution's governance

Criterion 15. Student Services

The institution provides for all of its students appropriate student services that support student learning, persistence, and development consistent with their characteristics and its institutional purposes⁷.

- Demographic characteristics of students (gender, ethnicity, typical age, or other useful characteristics)
- Intended methodology and data available (or intended) from reviews of student services units
- Description of qualifications of the key persons designated to provide these services

Criterion 16. Admissions

The institution has adopted and adheres to admission policies consistent with its purposes that specify the qualifications of students that are appropriate to the degree levels offered.

- Copy of admissions policy from a published statement, including criteria for admission
- Copy of enrollment application
- Articulation agreements
- Marketing or outreach plans and materials

Criterion 17. Information and Learning Resources

The institution holds or otherwise provides long-term access to sufficient information and learning resources to support its purposes and all of its educational programs. To supplement resources beyond the core library of the institution, there may be specific long-term written arrangements for student access to off-campus or electronic resources. Programs are in place to train students in the use of library and other information resources, and to develop information literacy skills. The institution must demonstrate that library and learning resource use is a fundamental part of all its curricula, and that the faculty is involved in ensuring such use.

- Profile of holdings and resources, including descriptions of computing facilities availability and usage
- Copies of agreements for access to external resources, for both print and electronic sources
- Description of information literacy expectations for institutional and external library and computing facilities
- Plan for library and computer development

Criterion 18. Financial Resources

The institution⁸ documents a viable funding base, financial resources, and plans for financial development adequate to support its purposes and educational programs and to ensure financial stability. It is expected that an operating institution not show a cumulative operating deficit for the current and

⁷ In institutions that regard students as research assistants or comparable categories, the applicant must demonstrate that its student support staff is able to understand and respond to the needs of students in their roles *as students* and to provide appropriate forms of support.

⁸ If the applicant offers an academic program that is part of a larger entity, without being separately incorporated from that entity, documents must show that the allocation of resources from the parent entity and other sources is sufficient to sustain the development and growth of the academic program.

preceding two years, or since its inception if less than two years. If the institution shows a deficit, the institution must explain the reasons for the deficit, demonstrate that it has the resources to ensure its financial viability, and present a plan to restore a fiscally healthy state.

- Current and proposed budgets for the next three years
- Documentation of any external foundation or other funding support
- Description of available resources, including lines of credit, properties held, and other forms of capitalization, sufficient to sustain the institution's operations during its pursuit of accreditation

Criterion 19. Financial Accountability

The institution annually undergoes and makes available an external financial audit⁹ by a certified public accountant or an audit by an appropriate public agency. The institution shall submit a copy of each of the two most recent audited financial statements and management letters (if any). The audit must (1) be prepared by an outside certified public accountant that has no other relationship to the institution; (2) be certified and any exceptions explained; and (3) specify whether any capital or operational funds have been provided by employees or Board members of the organization and describe any conditions related to such provisions.

- Certified independent audit, including management letter(s), for the two most recent years. It is recommended that the auditor employ the appropriate statements of accounting standards as follows:
 - State-supported institutions should use GASB Statements 34 and 35 and any other applicable GASB statements, which are available at <http://store.yahoo.com/gasbpubs/publications-statements-of-standards.html>.
 - Not-for-profit institutions should use the Audit and Accounting Guide, "Not-for-Profit Organizations," issued by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, which embodies FASB Statements 116 and 117 and other applicable FASB statements, available at <http://www.fasb.org/st#fas125>.
 - For-profit entities should use regular corporate accounting standards.
 - It is strongly recommended that institutions retain audit firms with considerable experience in higher education in view of increasingly specific state and federal expectations

Criterion 20. Institutional Planning

The institution provides evidence of basic planning for the development of the institution, which identifies and integrates plans for academic personnel, learning resources, facilities, and financial development. The institution also has established procedures for program and/or unit review, including methods for assessing student learning and the attainment of educational goals, and for using the data obtained from institutional research to support planning for institutional improvement.

- Current educational, fiscal, facilities, and distance education plans that include proposed growth and changes for the next three years
- Documentation of approval of current plans and of formal adoption of a systematic planning process by the institution's governing board
- Description of the institution's planning process, including calendared cycles

⁹ If financial and budget reports encompass a larger or parent entity of which the academic program is a component, evaluators must be able to review those dedicated portions of the reports that pertain to the academic program in order to make judgments about the viability and operational integrity of the academic unit. WASC evaluators must also be able to obtain sufficient financial information about the parent entity to be able to make judgments about its ability to sustain its educational program.

Criterion 21. Institutional Evaluation and Assessment of Student Learning

The institution actively engages in, or has a plan in place to systematically engage in, the evaluation of how well and in what ways it is accomplishing its purposes related to student learning and educational effectiveness.

- Description of the institution's plans for systematic institutional effectiveness review and quality assurance processes (if different from Criterion 20 above)
- Criteria for program and/or unit review
- Institutional plans for and/or activities undertaken to assess aggregate student achievement and to conduct program and/or unit reviews, including faculty engagement with evidence of student achievement

Criterion 22. Public Information

The institution publishes in its catalog, or in other appropriate places, accurate and current information that describes its purposes and objectives, admission requirements and procedures, financial aid policies and procedures, rules and regulations directly affecting students, programs and courses, degrees offered and the degree requirements, costs and refund policies, formal and informal grievance procedures, financial aid policies, academic credentials of faculty and administrators, and other items relative to students' attending the institution or withdrawing from it.

General Information must include at least the following:

- Official name, address, telephone, website
- Educational mission
- Course, program, degree offerings
- Academic calendar and program length
- Available student financial aid
- Available learning resources (library, technology, and support services)
- Names and degrees of administrators and faculty
- Names of governing board members
- Admissions criteria and processes
- Student fees and other financial obligations
- Degrees, certificates, graduation and transfer policies

Major Policies Affecting Students:

- Academic regulations including academic honesty
- Nondiscrimination policies and procedures
- Acceptance of transfer credits
- Grievance and complaint procedures
- Sexual harassment policies and procedures
- Refund of tuition and fees
- Location or publications where other policies may be found

Criterion 23. Relations with the Accrediting Commission

The governing board provides a formal statement as part of its Eligibility Application that the institution agrees to adhere to these Eligibility Criteria, describe itself in identical terms to all of its accrediting agencies, promptly communicate any changes in its status, and disclose any and all information required by the Commission to carry out its accrediting responsibilities. Such information includes actions taken

by governmental bodies and other accrediting agencies, including investigations, reports, and legal actions taken by or against the institution. Further, the institution agrees that in pursuing Candidacy and Initial Accreditation, it is committed to abiding by the Standards, Policies, and Procedures established by WASC.

- Copy of policy formally adopted by the governing board assuring compliance with Commission Standards, Policies, and Procedures
- List of other accreditations or approvals (if any) held by the institution
- Copies of the most recent actions taken by other accrediting agencies or approval bodies, including information about conditions or concerns raised by such bodies
- Copy of documents showing how the institution is represented by those accrediting agencies (may be copied from the agency's website)
- Copies of correspondence, reports, and other documents relating to investigations of the institution by any governmental entity and an update on the status of such investigation
- Reports concerning any pending legal actions by or against the institution, including a full explanation of the nature of the actions, parties involved, and status of the litigation

Representation of Eligible Status

A determination of Eligible is not a formal status with the Commission, but rather a preliminary review of an institution to determine that the institution is potentially creditable and may proceed with the process to achieve Candidacy. It is, therefore, important that the institution not represent Eligibility as other than it is. If an institution chooses to state publicly that it has been determined to be Eligible, it may make the following statement:

“(Name of institution) has applied for Eligibility from the Senior College Commission of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. WASC has reviewed the application and determined that (Name of institution) is eligible to proceed with an application for Candidacy for Accreditation. A determination of Eligibility is not a formal status with the Accrediting Commission, nor does it ensure eventual accreditation; it is a preliminary finding that the institution is potentially creditable and can proceed within four years of its Eligibility determination to be reviewed for Candidacy status with the Accrediting Commission. Questions about Eligibility may be directed to the institution or to WASC (<http://wascsenior.org/> or at 510-748-9001.”

No statement should be made about possible future accreditation status or qualification not yet conferred by the Commission. Statements such as the following are **not** permissible: “(Name of Institution) has applied for Eligibility [or Candidacy] with the Western Association of Schools and Colleges”; or “It is anticipated that Eligibility [or Candidacy] will be granted in the near future.” Such language will be viewed as a breach of institutional integrity.

Withdrawal of Eligibility

In the time following the grant of Eligibility, WASC staff retain the prerogative to withdraw Eligibility should it determine that the institution has failed to: (a) follow the procedures as outlined in this document; (b) make measurable progress as described in the timelines published in this document; or (c) meet the expectations concerning ethical conduct in its relations with the WASC Commission or staff. The institution is referred to paragraph 4 of the Notification of Intent to Apply for its right to request a review of the withdrawal by the Commission's Executive Committee. Under such circumstances, and following appropriate notice, the institution would be expected to remove from its website and other publications any reference to WASC Eligibility. No refunds would be provided for any fees submitted. Should the institution elect to reapply for Eligibility, a waiting period of at least one year must transpire. Fees in place at the time of reapplication will apply.

In the event WASC staff makes a decision to withdraw Eligibility, the institution will be notified by a letter from WASC staff which will include a statement of the reasons. If the institution does not agree with the reasons, it may request a review of the decision. Any such request must be addressed to the WASC staff liaison and must be received by WASC staff within two weeks of the institution's receipt of the notice of withdrawal. The institution's request must set forth the reasons that the institution disagrees with the basis for the withdrawal and the institution must attach any documentary evidence that the institution wishes WASC to consider. The Commission Executive Committee will review the matter. It may but is not required to invite the institution to appear before making its decision. When it has reached a decision, it will notify the institution and WASC staff of its decision. The decision will contain a concise statement of its reasons. Its decision shall constitute the final determination of WASC on the matter.

Support for Candidacy and Initial Accreditation

Institutions that have been found Eligible are expected to make expeditious progress toward achieving Candidacy or Initial Accreditation. Adequate progress is demonstrated by submitting the Letter of Intent and other documents described below in a timely manner and by working with the WASC liaison to arrange a site visit within two years of the grant of Eligibility.

In order to provide optimal institutional support during the next two stages, WASC staff offer specific support to help institutions understand and work with the Standards of Accreditation, respond to issues identified by the ERC panel during its review of the application, prepare institutional reports, and organize for site visits. A WASC staff liaison is assigned to the institution at the time that the Eligibility Review Committee convenes to review the application for Eligibility. The Candidacy support fee covers the Commission's work related to the review processes. (Current fees may be found on the WASC website at <http://wascsenior.org/resources/eligibility>.) The fee covers these activities:

1. Staff will review draft reports; establish and orient visiting teams; assist teams with site visits; and follow up with feedback to the institution related to Commission actions; one WASC staff liaison visit to the institution is provided, if requested, with staff travel expenses invoiced to the institution.
2. Staff will evaluate institutional and visiting team reports; when the Commission takes formal action regarding Candidacy, staff draft and send action letters and help to clarify the next steps in seeking Initial Accreditation.

In addition to this support fee, institutions will pay the related review fee; each site team's visit expenses (team travel, meal, and hotel expenses); any legal fees incurred by WASC on behalf of the institution in its pursuit of Eligibility, Candidacy, or Initial Accreditation; and for institutional participation in any workshops provided by WASC. (NOTE: Utilizing these support services does not guarantee that an institution will achieve its desired standing either in the first or in subsequent attempts.)

NOTE: The following section (pages 15-26) applies to institutions applying under Pathway A. Institutions applying under Pathway B should reference the policy on pages 27-29 and consult with the assigned WASC staff liaison.

Candidacy

When a determination has been made by the Eligibility Review Committee that an institution meets the Eligibility Criteria specified above, the institution will then submit a formal **Application for Candidacy**. The application form is to be signed by the chief executive officer of the institution and the chair of the governing board and submitted with the Candidacy application fee. The application form and schedule of fees are found at the WASC website (<http://wascsenior.org/resources/eligibility>). The Candidacy fee

covers the partial costs of WASC staff support throughout the Candidacy application process as described above. Institutions are also invited to send representatives to the WASC workshops that provide support in preparation for the comprehensive review process.

The Candidacy Review

The Candidacy Review is an institution's first review under the Commission's Standards of Accreditation. The granting of Candidacy is a significant step and should be based on evidence of meeting WASC Standards. It is fundamentally a compliance review in which an institution demonstrates that it meets the expectations for accreditation at a minimum level by:

1. Demonstrating that it has reviewed itself with reference to the Standards of Accreditation, including attention to each Criterion for Review and Guideline.
2. Demonstrating that it meets all or nearly all of the Criteria for Review and Guidelines at least at a minimum level.
3. Demonstrating that it meets all or nearly all of the Standards of Accreditation at a minimum level.
4. Having a clear and feasible plan in place to meet all the Standards and Criteria for Review at a substantial level by the time of the Initial Accreditation Review.
5. Having developed approaches to self-examination and to ensuring quality in its teaching and learning functions.

An institution seeking Candidacy must have students enrolled in degree programs at the time of the Candidacy Review.

Candidacy Review Process

Institutions applying for Candidacy engage in a three-stage review process, which includes:

- The Letter of Intent
- Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR)
- Educational Effectiveness Review (EER)

The Letter of Intent is outlined below. The CPR and EER process is explained in detail in the *Handbook of Accreditation*. It is important to read the relevant sections of the *Handbook of Accreditation* prior to developing the Letter of Intent to ensure that the institution has a thorough understanding of the entire three-stage process, which typically takes three to four years.

Letter of Intent. Twelve months prior to the date of the first site visit for Candidacy the institution submits a Letter of Intent (LOI) to the WASC office. The LOI should address the following:

1. The LOI for Candidacy should describe how the institution has addressed each of the areas of concern identified as requiring further development in the Eligibility Review Committee (ERC) Action Letter granting Eligibility under each of the Eligibility Criteria. The document "Shifting the Focus" will assist the institution in framing its review around the Standards for accreditation rather than the Eligibility Criteria.
2. Description of how the institution will prepare for the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) and the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER), including organizational structures and timelines, using a comprehensive approach that addresses each of the Standards of Accreditation

and related Criteria for Review (CFRs). The letter should address how broad support for the review process will be generated. It should also indicate how key leaders and other stakeholders will be involved in preparing for each review.

3. Identification of intended outcomes that the institution wishes to achieve by means of the review process. Key institutional issues arising under the Standards, especially those related to learning results and organizational quality assurance, should be directly addressed, with alignment to the CPR and the EER.
4. As needed, a description and explanation of any changes in the leadership, ownership, or governance structures of the organization that have transpired subsequent to the ERC review.
5. The institution's most recent audited financial statement, with detailed explanations for any negative financial levels or trends and for any matters of concern identified by the auditors in the related Management Letter (which should be included if provided by the auditor).
6. The current Summary Data Form, showing enrollment and retention levels and trends by degree level, faculty and staff hires, and similar relevant operational data.
7. A stipulation that the institution will be reviewed only for the degree levels and programs in operation, or explicitly planned and fully documented in all relevant areas of the Eligibility application, at the time of the ERC review. Any new degree levels or programs, off-campus, or distance education programs considered for initiation in the time span between the designation of Eligibility and the awarding of Candidacy requires prior approval by the Eligibility Review Committee. Any new degree levels or programs, off-campus or distance education programs, or other Substantive Changes anticipated during the period between the awarding of Candidacy and the review for Initial Accreditation must receive prior approval from the Substantive Change committee.

While there are no page limits specified for the narrative, it should be concise. Typically, Letters of Intent are between five and ten pages (2,500 to 5,000 words) in length.

The Letter of Intent is submitted electronically via Live Text (www.livetext.com). The ALO should use the username and password provided upon application for Eligibility or contact WASC to be given access to this information again.

The Letter of Intent is reviewed by the assigned WASC staff liaison, who considers whether the letter provides all the required information and attachments, responds to concerns identified in the previous Eligibility Review Committee or Commission actions, identifies key areas on which the institution will work during the review process, and sets forth a realistic and appropriate plan and timeline for the review. The staff liaison ordinarily approves the Letter of Intent within a month after submission. Revisions to the Letter of Intent may be requested if the staff liaison finds the letter to be lacking any key elements or otherwise reveals a lack of the readiness for the institution to pursue Candidacy or Initial Accreditation.

Upon approving the Letter of Intent, the staff liaison works with the institution to schedule the CPR site visit within approximately 12 to 18 months. The EER visit typically occurs 12 months after the CPR visit.

Approach to the Review. Prior to the CPR, and again before the EER, it is the responsibility of the institution to do a self-review that addresses the five components described under "The Candidacy Review" (above). During the Capacity and Preparatory Review, institutions are expected to address the Standards at the level of performance indicated in each Criterion for Review and related Guidelines, demonstrating that it meets these at least at a minimum level. In writing the Capacity and Preparatory Review Report, which is due 12 weeks before the site visit, institutions should include reflective essays on the institution's findings under each Standard.

During the Educational Effectiveness Review, institutions are again expected to follow a comprehensive approach to the review, which addresses each of the Standards and CFRs. This approach enables an institution to review how well it supports student learning across the institution and how overall quality assurance systems are employed to assess and improve student and organizational learning. The Educational Effectiveness report, due 12 weeks before the site visit, should move beyond description of activities to include analysis and reflection on learning results and the actions that the institution has taken for improvement of those results.

It is expected that faculty will be involved in developing the assessment strategy, in writing both the Capacity and Preparatory Review and the Educational Effectiveness Review reports, and in constructing the exhibits that accompany each report. Since these are the initial visits for the institution under Commission Standards, the institution is to give primary attention to presenting evidence demonstrating compliance with Commission Standards.

Compliance Audit: Required of all institutions seeking WASC accreditation, this form is used to confirm that the institution has in place a core set of policies, procedures, and forms essential for operation. As an aspect of the Capacity and Preparatory Review, the institution should complete the form electronically, creating internal links to the required documents. During the site visit, the team will verify the existence of the required documents.

Timing for the Review. For the Candidacy review, the Capacity and Preparatory Review and Educational Effectiveness Review will normally occur two semesters (or one year) apart unless, following the Capacity & Preparatory Review, WASC staff determine that the interval should be modified (though not extended more than two years). Precise scheduling of these visits will depend on institutional readiness and availability of WASC staff for placement on the visit calendar. In addition, the Commission will make a decision only after both reviews have been completed, rather than after each stage of review. Issues raised during the Capacity and Preparatory Review may be carried over to the Educational Effectiveness Review.

Team Reports and Institutional Due Process. In the Candidacy process, the visiting teams for the Capacity and Preparatory Review and the Educational Effectiveness Review will prepare reports following each of these reviews. The report following the Capacity and Preparatory Review is submitted to the WASC office; the staff liaison then communicates its findings to the institution through a Letter of Transmittal. The team report following the Educational Effectiveness Review is also submitted to the Commission. The Commission will take actions regarding the institution only after the completion of both stages of the review. Consistent with WASC procedures with visiting team reports, the institution will be given a draft copy of each report for correction of errors of fact prior to the report being finalized. Once the report is finalized, the chief executive officer of the institution is also given opportunity to respond in writing to the final report that is provided to the Commission, and is invited to appear before the Commission following the Educational Effectiveness Review to discuss the team reports before Commission action is taken.

Commission policy permits an institution to withdraw its request for Candidacy at any time and without prejudice (even after the Capacity and Preparatory and Educational Effectiveness Reviews) prior to final action by the Commission.

Denial of Candidacy

A decision to deny Candidacy is subject to Commission review and WASC appeals processes. An institution that is denied Candidacy following the Institutional Review Process may reapply for Candidacy when it can demonstrate that it has substantially addressed or resolved those issues identified in the Commission action of denial. In such cases the Commission typically extends institutional Eligibility for a specified period. Reapplication may be made only during the term of the institution's Eligibility; otherwise, a new application for Eligibility will need to be submitted. The Commission's

Policy on Reapplication after Denial of Candidacy or Initial Accreditation (available on the WASC website) guides the Commission in determining the steps the institution will need to take as it reapplies for Candidacy under these circumstances.

Representation of Candidate Status in Institutional Publications

Candidate for Accreditation status is granted for a maximum period of four years and is not retroactive. Once an institution has attained the status of Candidate for Accreditation, it should provide students with appropriate notice of its status, such as in the course catalog and on the institutional website. The institution must use the following statement whenever it describes that status publicly:

“[Name of institution] has been recognized as a Candidate for Accreditation by the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 985 Atlantic Avenue, #100, Alameda, CA 94501, 510-748-9001. This status is a preliminary affiliation with the Commission awarded for a maximum period of four years. Candidacy is an indication that the institution is progressing toward Accreditation. Candidacy is not Accreditation and does not ensure eventual Accreditation.”

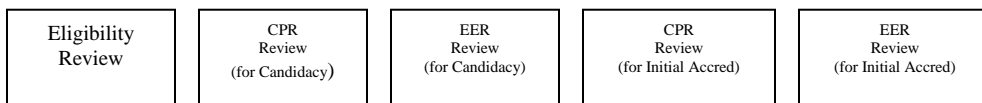
Procedures Required of Candidate Institutions

Institutions granted Candidacy are required to:

1. Submit an Annual Report in the format required by the Commission
2. Keep the Commission informed of any significant changes or developments, especially those required to obtain prior approval by the Commission Substantive Change Policy
3. Pay annual dues according to the schedule posted on the WASC website, prorated from the date of the award of Candidacy

Process to Accelerate the Candidacy and Initial Accreditation Reviews under Pathway A

A typical review that leads to Initial Accreditation calls for an Eligibility Review, followed by four self-studies and four site visits, two for Candidacy, two for Initial Accreditation, as follows:



The Commission has established the status of Candidacy as one of preliminary affiliation with the Commission. The Commission’s experience is that institutions, especially new ones, typically need the approximately four-year period of Candidacy to meet Commission Standards at a substantial enough level to be granted Initial Accreditation. In unusual circumstances, especially for established institutions, the findings of the first site visit team may lead it to believe that the institution does not need the full four-visit sequence leading to Candidacy and then to Initial Accreditation. Upon the recommendation of the CPR site team and WASC staff, the Commission may adopt an abbreviated review process. In such cases, the alternative steps may result in fewer than the usual four site visits, potentially resulting in a shortened timeline before Initial Accreditation is granted.

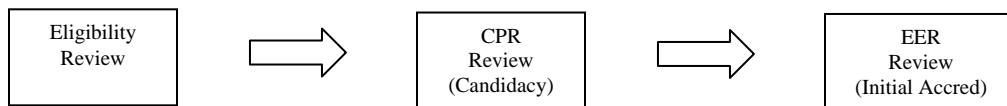
Two options for acceleration are available and set forth below. In either case, the visiting team and WASC staff consider the following factors when making a recommendation to the Commission for an accelerated process toward Initial Accreditation:

1. Maturity: The institution has a sufficient history to enable a review team to make judgments about its future performance with respect to the Standards.
2. Resources: The institution has substantial and stable capacity, with no outstanding issues of concern in terms of finances, personnel, or its physical plant.
3. Results: The institution has substantial evidence of academic performance and educational effectiveness, including culminating measures of learning for its graduates.
4. Substantial Compliance: During the Capacity and Preparatory Review, the site team identifies no major areas of concern under the Standards.
5. Institutional Complexity and Stability: Institutions are generally more likely to be considered for acceleration if they offer an established and well-developed degree program or a small number of such programs and are not in a period of rapid change or growth.

Institutions will not be considered for acceleration if they will not have graduates by the time of the final site visit.

Acceleration Option 1:

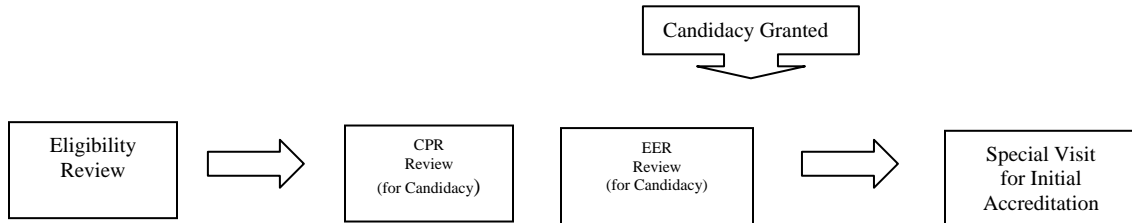
Upon the recommendation of the initial CPR team and WASC staff, the Commission may authorize that the next review team will evaluate the institution for Initial Accreditation during its subsequent EER site visit. Following the second visit, the team may make one of several recommendations to the Commission: (a) Grant Initial Accreditation; (b) Deny Initial Accreditation and grant Candidacy; (c) Defer action pending further institutional preparation on a few issues that can be readily addressed, with the institution remaining in Eligibility status. Under the conditions of this accelerated process, if the institution is granted Candidacy rather than Initial Accreditation, it may not appeal the Commission's decision.



For institutions that are recommended for acceleration under Option 1, the Educational Effectiveness Review for Initial Accreditation will occur 12 to 18 months following the CPR visit. In addition, the on-site reviews for Initial Accreditation will be expanded by one day. The Commission will take action only after the Educational Effectiveness Review.

Acceleration Option 2:

This second option for acceleration is available later in the process, following the first two visits and the grant of Candidacy. In this case, the institution completes two self-studies and visits and the Commission grants Candidacy. The Commission acknowledges in taking this action that a two-visit cycle for Initial Accreditation may not be necessary to establish *substantial* compliance with all WASC Standards. Following the granting of Candidacy, the Commission schedules a single Special Visit to focus only on those remaining issues identified in its action letter. This can be diagrammed as follows:



Under Option 2 for acceleration, the interval between the Candidacy action and the Special Visit would typically be 12 months but no more than 24 months. At the conclusion of the Special Visit, the Commission may grant Initial Accreditation and schedule the next comprehensive review in five to seven years. If the site team finds insufficient progress on the identified issues, it may recommend an additional visit, with the institution remaining in Candidacy. Such a decision by the Commission is not subject to appeal.

Initial Accreditation

An institution is reviewed for Initial Accreditation no later than the end of its four-year term of Candidacy or at an earlier date as determined by Commission action. To be reviewed for Initial Accreditation, an institution must have graduated at least one class that has completed a full cycle of one or more of the institution's programs prior to the completion of the institutional review process.

In seeking Initial Accreditation, the institution shall submit an Application for Initial Accreditation signed by the chief executive officer and governing board chair. A copy of the application form may be found at the WASC website: <http://wascsenior.org/resources/eligibility>.

The institution will undertake the review process outlined in Section III of the *Handbook of Accreditation*, with the exception that the institution is not required to submit a Proposal or a Letter of Intent. The institution is expected to respond to any issues identified in the Commission's action letter awarding Candidacy. All Initial Accreditation reviews follow a comprehensive approach for the institution's reports, which addresses all CFRs, rather than utilizing a thematic approach. The Commission shall specify the dates for the Capacity and Preparatory Review and the Educational Effectiveness Review at the time of granting Candidacy. These reviews will normally be conducted three semesters apart, though the Commission may set a shorter or longer interval depending on scheduling availability and institutional readiness. The Commission will take action following each of the two reviews.

The Initial Accreditation Review

The Initial Accreditation Review moves beyond a mere compliance review, considering evidence of the institution's capacity for deep engagement with significant issues, including issues related to the institution's educational effectiveness. The institution demonstrates that it meets all of the Standards of Accreditation and the Core Commitments by:

1. Demonstrating that it has reviewed itself in reference to the Standards of Accreditation and the Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness.
2. Demonstrating that it meets all of the Standards at a substantial level.
3. Demonstrating its commitment to developing and sustaining Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness.
4. Demonstrating that it has successfully addressed the Criteria for Review and Guidelines identified in the action letter as being of concern at the time of the Candidacy review.
5. Having collected evidence of student learning and being able to demonstrate how it has used such evidence to support inquiry and improvement in support of educational effectiveness.

An institution seeking Initial Accreditation must have graduated at least one class that has completed a full cycle of one or more of the institution's programs prior to the completion of the institutional review process. The institution should demonstrate broad engagement with capacity and educational effectiveness issues, avoiding mere assertions of compliance. In acting to grant Initial Accreditation, the Commission may set the effective date of accreditation up to six months prior to the date of the Commission's action in order to accommodate the most recent graduating class, providing that during its visit the team has been able to evaluate evidence of the graduates' culminating achievements.

Representation of Accredited Status in Institutional Publications

Initial Accreditation is granted for a maximum period of seven years. Accreditation status is not granted retroactively, though in some cases the effective date may be set prior to the date of the Commission action. Institutions granted the status of Accreditation must use the following statement if they wish to describe the status publicly.

“[Name of institution] is accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 985 Atlantic Avenue, #100, Alameda, CA 94501, 510-748-9001.”

The phrase “fully accredited” is to be avoided, since no partial accreditation is possible.

The accredited status of a program should not be misrepresented. The accreditation granted by WASC has reference to the quality of the institution as a whole. Since institutional accreditation does not imply specific accreditation of any particular program in the institution, statements such as “this program is accredited” or “this degree is accredited” are incorrect and misleading.

Reapplication

The Commission decision to deny Initial Accreditation is subject to Commission review and WASC appeals processes. An institution that is not granted Initial Accreditation may reapply only after it is prepared to demonstrate that it has corrected the deficiencies noted in the review process. It must wait at least one year before reapplying. The Commission's *Policy on Reapplication after Denial of Candidacy or Initial Accreditation* (available at <http://wascsenior.org/>) guides the Commission in determining the steps the institution will need to take as it reapplies for Initial Accreditation under these circumstances.

Degree Level Approval

The Commission has designated three categories of institutional authority to initiate new degree programs, with related institutional responsibilities for applying for new degree approval through the WASC Substantive Change process. In brief, these categories are as follows: **General Approval (G)** is granted to institutions that have offered 10 or more degrees in at least five different disciplines for 10 or more years. These institutions may offer new degree programs without prior approval from the Substantive Change process. **Specified Approval (S)** applies to institutions that have offered five or more degrees in a specified field for at least 10 years. These institutions may offer new programs in these disciplines at the same degree level(s) without obtaining prior approval through the Substantive Change process. All other institutions are considered as having **Individual Approval (I)**, which means that the institution must apply in advance for approval to begin any new degree programs. (See the policy *Categories of Degree-Level Approval and Related Institutional Responsibilities* at <http://wascsenior.org/>.)

Institutions that have been granted Candidacy and are pursuing Initial Accreditation are designated as having “**I**” approval classification. The Commission’s action letter granting Candidacy will specify the degrees that are being offered at the time. Any additional degree programs anticipated by Candidate institutions must be approved in advance through the Substantive Change process.

When an institution is evaluated for Initial Accreditation, the visiting team that makes the recommendation to the Commission to grant Initial Accreditation (following the Educational Effectiveness Review) will also make a recommendation with respect to the institution’s degree-level classification. In making this recommendation, the team will take into account the institution’s degree program history and the Commission’s relevant decision criteria. The Commission’s action will be consistent with the Degree-Level Approval policy. The action letter granting Initial Accreditation will specify the institution’s degree authority classification and list the degrees being offered, and their instructional modality, at the time of the decision.

Fees and Charges

Institutions granted Candidacy and/or Initial Accreditation will be assessed annual dues, prorated from the effective date of the Commission’s action. A dues and fee schedule for the Commission is prepared each year and is available on the WASC website and from the Commission office. Annual dues are based on institutional enrollment. In addition, fees and expenses are charged for the following activities, with fees due and payable upon submission of the application. Late payments for any invoices from the WASC office may jeopardize the institution’s accreditation.

Eligibility Applications: Fees are charged for the initial application, reapplications, and for appeal of Eligibility determinations.

Candidacy/Initial Accreditation Applications: After an institution has been determined to be eligible, it is required to file a fee at the time of its application for Candidacy. As the institution is not invoiced for membership dues until Candidacy is granted, this fee covers some on-site consultation, staff conferences by phone or email, and other forms of staff support in preparation for institutional self studies, reports, and team visits.

Evaluation Visits: The institution is billed for the expenses of the visiting team, including team conference calls and staff travel, and the visit fee established for the type of visit. Expenses related to special visits made by the Commission because of special inquiries are also paid by the institution.

Special Charges: Additional charges will be assessed for unusually complex evaluations which require staff time beyond that normally expended. These include visits to out-of-region programs and to institutions requiring unusually large teams in relation to the size of the institution.

Commission Review of a Negative Action: When an institution requests a Commission Review, there will be a special processing fee and a deposit against anticipated costs, both due at the time of a written request for a review. If the actual costs are less than paid, the excess will be refunded. If actual costs are greater, the institution will be billed for the difference.



How to Become Accredited: An Overview

| | Eligibility to Apply for, and Steps to Achieve, Candidacy | In the Candidacy Period | Initial Accreditation |
|--|---|--|---|
| Duration of Status and Sequence of Steps: | <p>a) Eligibility is granted for a maximum of four years, from date of ERC action letter to date of Commission action granting Candidacy.</p> <p>b) The institution demonstrates intent to pursue Candidacy by submitting an application and fee within 60 days of receiving ERC letter.</p> <p>c) The CPR visit for Candidacy is typically scheduled two to four semesters after Eligibility is granted, with a two-semester interval before the EER visit. A Letter of Intent is submitted to WASC 12 months prior to CPR visit.</p> <p>d) If Candidacy is not achieved within the four-year period, upon evidence provided through a visit, the Commission may extend the Eligibility period by up to one year.</p> <p>e) If Commission denies Candidacy, it will specify which steps must be repeated to reapply, potentially including up to a new ERC review.</p> | <p>a) Candidacy is granted for a maximum of four years, beginning from receipt of the Commission action letter granting Candidacy and continuing to the date of the Commission action granting Initial Accreditation</p> <p>b) The CPR visit for Initial Accreditation is typically scheduled two semesters after the EER for Candidacy, with the EER visit for Initial Accreditation two or three semesters later</p> <p>c) If Initial Accreditation is not achieved within the four year period, upon evidence provided through a team visit, the Commission may extend Candidacy period by up to one year.</p> <p>d) If Commission denies Initial Accreditation, it will specify which steps must be repeated to reapply, potentially including one or more visits and a new ERC review</p> <p>e) The Commission takes action only following the EER except when acting to allow an accelerated process</p> | <p>The Commission takes action following each of the two site visits. Initial Accreditation is granted for five or seven years, as set by Commission. The time period is from Commission action granting Initial Accreditation to the date of the CPR visit for reaffirmation of accreditation.</p> |
| Judgment based on: | 23 Eligibility Criteria | Standards of Accreditation and CFRs at minimal level (See also pp. 14-18) | Standards of Accreditation and CFRs at substantial level (See also pp. 17-19) |

| | Eligibility to Apply for, and Steps to Achieve, Candidacy | In the Candidacy Period | Initial Accreditation |
|---------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Primary focus of review: | Determines if institution demonstrates both the fit and promise to achieve WASC accreditation in terms of mission and strength, offering program(s) in generally recognized fields of knowledge, and showing promise of achieving Initial Accreditation within allotted time. | Determines if institution has depth and scope of planning and resources to show promise for achievement of Initial Accreditation by the time of its Initial Accreditation reviews | Determines that institution is ready for accreditation and continuation of this status under the regular WASC reaffirmation cycle |
| Operational Status: | State licensure/approval; governance staff, planning, and resources in place and adequate to sustain efforts | Students enrolled in the programs | Students graduated from a full cycle of one or more of the degree program(s) |
| Type of Review: | Virtual review; by WASC staff and a Panel of the Eligibility Review Committee (ERC) | On-site by peer team; Letter of Intent one year in advance Two-stage, normally two semesters apart, assuming institutional strength and scheduling availability; Commission action only after EE review; staff Transmittal Letter after CPR Comprehensive Model for self-study | On-site by peer team; Letter of Intent one year in advance Two-stage, normally two or three semesters apart, depending on institutional strength and scheduling availability; maximum two years apart Commission action following each review Comprehensive Model for self-study |
| Fee and Dues: | Fee: As posted on website. No annual dues | Candidacy Fee as posted on WASC website, plus review fee and visit expenses for each review. Annual Dues payable upon receiving either Candidacy or, if accelerated, Initial Accreditation. | |

Accreditation Process for Pathway B

Initial Accreditation of Institutions Currently Accredited by a USDOE-Recognized Agency

This section of the policy addresses the expectations and procedures that apply when an institution that is already accredited by a USDOE-recognized institutional accrediting agency seeks WASC ACSCU accreditation. Such an application may be occasioned because the institution is operating a separately accreditable unit within the WASC region, is relocating its headquarters and main campus to the WASC region, or – as in the case of institutions accredited by WASC ACCJC – plans to offer two or more baccalaureate degrees.¹⁰ These procedures ensure that an applicant is evaluated against WASC Eligibility Criteria and Standards for Accreditation, regardless of its accreditation by another agency. Except for the provisions herein, all other elements of “How to Become Accredited” will apply.

The following expectations and procedures apply to an applicant institution:

1. **Accreditation Status:** The institution must be accredited and in good standing (that is, not under any formal sanction) with its current accrediting association at the time of the application. Any changes in the accrediting status that take place during the application process must be fully disclosed to WASC.
2. **Eligibility Application:** The institution seeking WASC accreditation must submit an eligibility application, and the appropriate fee, to verify that it meets the WASC Eligibility Criteria. In addition to the documentation typically expected for this review, the information will verify that the institution’s headquarters or primary campus operates within the WASC region or qualifies under the Policy on Separately Accreditable Institutions. If the applicant operates teaching locations outside WASC jurisdiction, the applicant will verify that such units meet applicable state regulatory requirements for each such location. The requested materials are also to include a copy of the visiting team report(s) and action letter(s) from the current accrediting agency that were produced in connection with the most recent comprehensive review of the institution and with any subsequent special or focused reports and actions.
3. **Eligibility Review.** An eligibility review panel will review the application under the Eligibility Criteria and these provisions. If the institution is found to meet all Eligibility Criteria, the review panel will grant eligibility and determine whether to proceed with a single combined visit or require that the institution undergo a two-stage visit process with a Capacity and Preparatory Review and Educational Effectiveness Review. In either case, the Committee will also highlight any issues that should be addressed in the self-review and visit process.
4. **Consultation with Other Accrediting Agency:** At the time when the applicant submits its eligibility application, staff will consult with the agency or agencies that already accredit the applicant institution to obtain full records of the applicant institution’s accreditation history and to determine if there are specific issues that have arisen in previous accreditation activity that should be addressed by WASC staff, the eligibility review panel, or the site team in considering the application.

¹⁰ This Pathway may also be available in the unusual circumstance when an institution currently accredited by WASC elects to divide itself into two separately accredited institutions. In such cases, the institution is advised to consult with WASC staff early in its planning in order to identify the issues that may need to be addressed.

5. **Application for Initial Accreditation:** Upon approval of the Eligibility Review Committee, the institution will submit an application for initial accreditation, the relevant fee, and supporting narrative and documentation as required by WASC.

As a component of the application, the institution will conduct a self-study of its compliance with WASC Standards. The institution will respond to each of the applicable Criteria for Review (CFRs) and provide supporting documentation as appropriate. The application normally should not exceed 50 pages, excluding appendices. The document “Self-Study Guidelines for Institutions Seeking Initial Accreditation Under Pathway B” is available on the WASC website.

Any changes in operational status, governance or ownership structures of the institution or its parent entity that occur during or as an aspect of the application must be fully disclosed to WASC. The responsibility for notification also applies to changes that the institution plans to make or knows will be made subsequent to the anticipated accreditation by WASC ACSCU.

6. **Communication with the Department of Education:** As a part of its application, the institution will stipulate that it has acquired, or intends to acquire, its own US Department of Education (DOE) Program Participation Agreement (PPA) and related Office of Postsecondary Education Identifier (OPEID) number. Even if the applicant is part of a system or has a parent entity that is accredited by an accrediting agency other than WASC, DOE policy requires the WASC accredited entity to obtain its own OPEID number within two years of receiving WASC accreditation in order to continue Title IV participation. If multiple governance entities are involved, the entities will submit a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) stipulating the arrangement among them for ensuring oversight by the parent entity and compliance of the applicant institution with DOE requirements and procedures until such time as the applicant acquires its own number. The applicant institution must also verify that the appropriate Federal Student Aid (FSA) office has reviewed this MOU and has determined that it complies with relevant DOE policy. Should the WASC Commission approve the application and grant candidacy or accreditation to the applicant, the effective date of the action will be coordinated with the effective date of DOE recognition for Title IV purposes to ensure that students are appropriately covered at all times.

7. **Site Visit and Team Report:** Upon receipt of the application for accreditation and necessary fees, WASC will appoint a site visit team and schedule the dates for all necessary visits. For an institution with multiple locations, the team will visit its headquarters or main campus and a significant sampling of its instructional locations. If the institution offers programs by distance education, the team will evaluate these programs. Visits will be conducted to verify the information provided in the application and to address any issues raised by the ERC panel.

The site team will prepare a report of its findings showing how the institution complies with the WASC Standards. Prior to the submission of the final report to the Commission, the institution will be given an opportunity to review the report for correction of errors of fact. The institution will also be given an opportunity to prepare a written response to the final team report, which will be provided to the Commission for consideration along with the report.

8. **Final Review and Approval:** The site team will be able to make a confidential recommendation to the Commission as follows:

a. **Deny Candidacy or Initial Accreditation.**

b. **Defer action on the application.**

- c. **Grant candidacy.** If the institution demonstrates compliance with the WASC Standards and CFRs at a *minimum* level, yet shows promise for achieving *substantial* compliance within the time period allocated for candidacy (four years), it may be designated as a Candidate institution.
- d. **Grant initial accreditation.** If the institution is found to be in *substantial* compliance with all of the WASC Standards, the institution may be granted initial accreditation and placed on a comprehensive review cycle of five years. Such a designation does not preclude the Commission from requiring either an interim report or a special visit.

The Commission will follow its usual procedures in acting on the application, including providing an opportunity to the institution to meet with the Commission panel reviewing its application. The Commission will make its decision in keeping with the policy on “Commission Decisions on Institutions” (in the *Handbook of Accreditation*). Should the Commission deny the application by granting neither candidacy nor initial accreditation, the institution may either address deficient areas as identified by the Commission and resubmit its application or it may exercise the right of review and request for reconsideration as described in “How to Become Accredited.”

- 8. **Effective Date of Candidacy or Accreditation and Annual Dues:** The date when WASC candidacy or accreditation becomes effective will be set by the Commission. Annual Commission dues will be prorated from that date.